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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #2240-83
22 March 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : [redacted]
Assistant National Intelligence Officer
for USSR-Eastern Europe

25X1

SUBJECT : Contingency Paper on What Would Happen if Andropov Were to Die

I think you will find the attached contingency paper interesting. It was prepared at the request of Herb Meyer and was written by [redacted] one of SOVA's outstanding analysts who has recently joined the NIC/AG on a rotational tour.

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DCI/NIC/NIO/USSR- [redacted] (22 March 83) [redacted]

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A USSR Without Andropov?

Although Yuriy Andropov has been in office for only four months, [redacted] it prudent to consider what impact his departure would have on Soviet politics and policy. The outcome and nature of a succession to Andropov would of course depend on political and economic conditions in the USSR at the time, and on the international environment. This contingency memo examines how Andropov's departure might affect the Soviet Union if he died suddenly tomorrow. 25X1 25X1

Andropov's sudden death very likely would result in a "deep" succession characterized by sharp conflict within the leadership. Since the late 1970s, and especially over the last year, evidence has accumulated that Soviet leaders have become more pessimistic about the domestic problems they face than they have been for the past quarter of a century. They would consequently regard the choice of a new party head at this juncture as a decision of the utmost importance for the future of the regime and the country--as was the case when Brezhnev died. The situation would be complicated this time, however, by the absence of a candidate for the top job well qualified in terms of political standing and policy views acceptable to other key leaders. The man currently best positioned to succeed by virtue of experience and overlapping membership in the Politburo and Secretariat, Chernenko, has taken positions on a number of important issues that are outside the mainstream of Politburo opinion and he lacks the confidence of several senior leaders.

For this reason, a succession taking place now probably would be more wrenching and difficult than was the succession of Andropov. Chernenko's ascendency would by no means be assured, and the possibility exists that the process of selection itself would be irregular, with one faction or another calling on the military and KGB to block Chernenko's bid. Whoever the successor, it is likely that his power would be severely shackled, and divisions within the Politburo could temporarily reduce the regime's ability to respond effectively to challenges at home and abroad.

The Current Alignment of Forces on the Politburo

At present, Andropov probably does not command a reliable majority whose support he can count on across the board. Leaders associated with the foreign policy - military - security apparatus appear to constitute the core of his strength. These include not only Defense Minister Ustinov and Foreign Minister Gromyko, but probably also First Deputy Premier Aliyev, a former KGB official. Ukrainian party boss Shcherbitskiy is also reported to be a strong backer.

Apparently ranged against these leaders is a group of party and government-based leaders that includes Chernenko, Premier Tikhonov, and Kazakh party boss Kunayev. These leaders were closely associated with Brezhnev in the past, and they evidently believe the basic thrust of Andropov's policies poses a threat to the institutional and political interests they represent. The remaining four Politburo members are probably "floaters" who support some of Andropov's policy initiatives while opposing others.

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These groupings in the Politburo do not necessarily constitute stable alliances that will endure. Since leadership alliances are based on each leader's perception at a given point in time of how he can best protect his institutional power base, further his political career, and advance the policies he favors, they tend to shift as circumstances change. Andropov's death would consequently create a fluid situation from which new groupings could emerge.

The issues

The fundamental question underlying policy debate following Andropov's departure would be whether to move further in the general direction he has taken or to return to the status quo that prevailed under Brezhnev. Despite elements of policy continuity, Andropov has made tentative moves to chart a new course. The measures he has effected or advocated have defined the policy options before the leadership more clearly than previously and heightened friction within the Politburo.

An important element of Andropov's strategy for revitalizing the economy has been the enforcement of higher standards of performance for Soviet officials and greater emphasis on merit than on seniority as a criterion for advancement. Brezhnev's indulgent cadres policies, which gave party workers virtual tenure, appear to be undergoing a fundamental revision.

Support for this change in personnel policy is probably strong in the military and KGB, where concern about an erosion of official discipline has been especially keen. In addition, many young and ambitious party workers, frustrated by the slow rate of promotions under Brezhnev, are probably glad to see Andropov getting rid of dead wood and opening up career opportunities for those better qualified in terms of education and technical expertise.

But the drive to curtail official corruption and incompetence has created a climate of insecurity among many elites. Many older party and government workers, especially within the regional party apparatus and the economic bureaucracy, reportedly feel threatened. Even within the Politburo, leaders such as Leningrad party boss Romanov may feel vulnerable to charges of malfeasance or impropriety.

Other leaders are probably apprehensive about the broader implications of tightening party discipline. Already uneasy about Andropov's ties to the KGB and his appointment of career KGB officers as Minister of Interior and First Deputy Premier, they may see his drive to purify the party as a move to enhance the KGB's role at the expense of the party apparatus.

To spur labor productivity, Andropov has relied both on harsher punishment of "laggards," and on greater incentives for high worker output. His advocacy of a more differentiated wage policy, the decision to raise retail prices on some consumer goods, and his effort to tighten control over labor mobility, represent movement away from Brezhnev's more lax and egalitarian policies--which in effect guaranteed even unproductive workers a job and an income sufficient to buy basic necessities.

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Chernenko's speeches have indicated that he disagrees with Andropov about how to keep the labor force in line. He has put forth a "populist" program of his own that stresses the need to raise the standard of living for the population as a whole rather than for the most productive element, and he has openly criticized the frequent use of repressive measures against workers. Chernenko probably fears, as Brezhnev evidently did, that a "wager on the strong" such as Andropov is pushing runs the risk of provoking serious popular unrest.

Andropov's advocacy of a greater decentralization of economic decisionmaking and hints that the economic bureaucracy needs reorganizing are almost certainly controversial. Such steps would reduce the power of the Council of Ministers and Premier Tikhonov.

In nationality policy, Andropov has revived theoretical formulations associated in the past with efforts to increase cultural and political restrictions on non-Russians. By doing so, he may have provoked the opposition of some party leaders in non-Russian republics, several of whom sit on the Politburo as members or candidates and some of whom have been political allies of Chernenko.

In foreign policy, although there may be a fairly high degree of consensus within the Politburo regarding broad objectives, there are disagreements over tactics and priorities. Andropov's speeches, for example, by stressing more than those of Chernenko the need to support Third World "national liberation" movements, suggest that he is more inclined to challenge US interests in the Third World. Considering the suggestions in Chernenko's past speeches that he is willing to pay a relatively high price for detente, it is conceivable that he has questioned whether the introduction of SA5s in Syria, the generally more aggressive sale of advanced armaments to Third World countries, and the testing of new ICBMs possibly in violation of SALT, have created unnecessary stumbling blocks to improving relations with the US.

The question of East-West trade probably remains a bone of contention. The shift toward more autarkic policies began before Brezhnev died, as concern grew that Soviet dependence on grain and technology imports could make the USSR hostage to Western economic pressure. Leaders such as Andropov and Shcherbitskiy implied that Brezhnev had mistakenly attempted to substitute economic relations with the West for domestic solutions to economic problems. Chernenko, by contrast, staunchly supported increased trade with countries outside the bloc, and is probably still more favorably disposed toward an expansion of East-West trade.

Finally, the leadership is apparently divided over strategic issues. The somewhat higher priority Andropov's speeches have attached to providing for military needs compared to the public statements of Chernenko, the key role Ustinov reportedly played in the coalition that put Andropov in office, and reporting that some leaders are uncomfortable about Chernenko's views on national security, raise the possibility that Chernenko has clashed with Andropov and his allies over military issues. It is true that Ustinov and Andropov have publicly recognized the need for greater constraints on military priorities than have some professional military officers. But they are apparently more concerned than Chernenko to satisfy perceived military needs.

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The Candidates

All previous successors have been both Secretaries and Politburo members, but each of the two men who currently sit on both ruling bodies--Gorbachev and Chernenko--has serious handicaps as a contender. Gorbachev's limited experience at the national level and relatively narrow job responsibilities, chiefly for agriculture, would seem virtually to disqualify him.

Nor is Chernenko an ideal candidate from the point of view of other leaders. Having spent most of his career as a staff man, he lacks any significant experience in line party leadership or in supervising the economy. He has been Andropov's chief critic and key figures such as Ustinov and Gromyko are said to have misgivings about his leadership ability.

In these circumstances, the leadership could defy precedent in its selection of a successor. If this happened, Ustinov would be the most likely choice. He has had lengthy experience in the crucial defense industry sector and in foreign policy, and he earlier served in the secretariat for several years. His views on military spending are more acceptable to the military than are those of Chernenko, but he has also demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of the civilian economy. Although he has now been Minister of Defense for seven years, as a former party official he probably would not be seen by other leaders as posing a threat to the hegemony of party institutions. Nor would his advanced age necessarily be a liability, since his colleagues might prefer a "caretaker" to hold power temporarily until a younger man could be groomed for the job.

Alternatively, Moscow party boss Grishin could be a compromise choice acceptable to all factions. It is even conceivable that the Politburo would reach outside the core of senior Moscow-based leaders to select a regional figure such as Shcherbitskiy.

Nevertheless, Chernenko has important political assets. The ranking Secretary with Politburo standing, by now he has had broad experience in a wide range of party work and in foreign policy, and he enjoys considerable support at the Central Committee level. It would perhaps be more difficult to deny him the top post now than when Brezhnev died. Brezhnev's gradual physical decline gave Chernenko's opponents time to prepare. By promoting Andropov to the Secretariat six months before Brezhnev died, they were able to block Chernenko's bid. This time Chernenko's detractors have not yet positioned a challenger, and Andropov's sudden death would leave them without an immediately available logical candidate.

Impact on Policy

If no candidate were able to establish a strong claim to succeed, power would be more compartmented than during previous successions. Chernenko, in particular, probably would have to make major concessions to gain the acceptance of Ustinov and his allies. Chernenko's freedom to act independently would be severely constrained and it is conceivable that Ustinov would be made Chairman of the Defense Council. This diffusion of power could produce uncertainty, inconsistency or poor coordination in Soviet policy.

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A Chernenko succession would have the most immediate effect on cadres policy. Chernenko would probably act to bolster elite security, as Brezhnev did in 1964 following Khrushchev's disruptive reorganizational schemes and reshuffling of personnel. Chernenko would provide assurances that removals from office would be kept to a minimum, and that vacancies would be filled largely by regular promotions within institutions rather than through cross-posting or leapfrogging of lower-level officials into high posts. He would downplay the anti-corruption campaign and make clear that party control of the KGB remained a central element of regime policy.

In order to placate the government bureaucracy, Chernenko would probably oppose proposals for reorganizing economic management that involved any significant diminution of the authority of central ministries. At the same time, it is likely that he would seek the support of non-Russian leaders by advocating a more even-handed nationality policy, while appealing to consumer interests by emphasizing the primacy of the food program and by advocating a greater diversion of resources to consumer-oriented industry and an expansion of agricultural imports.

Since Chernenko's domestic program would probably offer even less promise than Andropov's of boosting GNP, he would be more concerned to place limits on military spending and consequently somewhat more flexible in INF and other arms control negotiations. It is a good bet that he would urge greater caution in supporting Third World clients and insurgencies, in order to avoid damaging the prospects for an improvement in East-West relations or risking military confrontation with the US.

Should Ustinov succeed, he probably would follow the general strategy Andropov has adopted. His military background and his past statements suggest that he would rely heavily on coercive measures to ensure social stability, while placing a high premium on the need to bolster executive discipline. He probably would urge some changes in the incentive structure to stimulate economic growth.

Like Andropov, Ustinov probably would act more assertively than Chernenko in exploiting opportunities to expand Soviet influence in the Third World, and would be somewhat less inclined to make compromises in pursuit of improved relations with the US. His past statements suggest, however, that he might be less sanguine than Andropov about the prospects for relaxing tensions with China.

Ustinov's primary loyalty is to the party, and his succession would not constitute a military takeover. Nonetheless, his military connection probably would increase the weight of military voices in policy deliberation, especially with regard to foreign affairs. It is conceivable that Ustinov would rely more heavily than Chernenko on arms sales and military assistance programs as instruments of Soviet policy, and that he would push more strongly for a more centralized Warsaw Pact command structure. This could further enhance the role of the professional military in dealing with Eastern Europe and the Third World.

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Other possible candidates have not expressed their policy preferences as clearly as have Ustinov and Chernenko. Any successor, however, probably would be motivated by political opportunism more than by any desire for consistency with past positions. To a considerable degree, his policies would reflect his need to pay close heed to the personal and institutional interests of those Politburo members on whose support he depended.

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